

## Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education

---

Issue 7 Fall 2012

---

# Introduction: Faculty-Student Collaboration in Developing an Innovative College-wide Program

Alison Cook-Sather

*Bryn Mawr College*

Kaushiki Dunusinghe

*Bryn Mawr College*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe>



Part of the [Higher Education and Teaching Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Cook-Sather, Alison and Dunusinghe, Kaushiki "Introduction: Faculty-Student Collaboration in Developing an Innovative College-wide Program," *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*: Iss. 7 (2012), <http://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe/vol1/iss7/1>

## INTRODUCTION

### Faculty-Student Collaboration in Developing an Innovative College-wide Program

*This seventh issue of Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education is co-edited by Alison Cook-Sather (Coordinator of The Andrew W. Mellon Teaching and Learning Institute at Bryn Mawr College) and Kaushiki Dunusinghe (Guest Student Editor, Bryn Mawr College 2012).*

When faculty members embark on collaborative teaching efforts, they multiply the complex variables that already inform any pedagogical undertaking: personality, area of expertise, approach to planning, teaching style. Working with students as partners in the context of such efforts both eases and further compounds this dynamic. Students bring important perspectives to the planning, implementation, and assessment of collaborative endeavors that inform and enrich those efforts; their positioning as partners and their own collaboration with faculty members also call into question and complicate traditional, more hierarchical arrangements and traditionally more clearly defined roles in teaching and learning in higher education.

All faculty members who participate in Bryn Mawr College's new, interdisciplinary 360° Course Cluster program take up the former challenge of working collaboratively with their faculty colleagues. In partnership with The Andrew W. Mellon Teaching and Learning Institute (TLI) at Bryn Mawr College, the 360 program has taken up the latter challenge, offering to any faculty member interested in developing, teaching, and assessing a 360 course cluster the opportunity to do so in collaboration with TLI student consultants. This issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education* features the reflections of several faculty members and student consultants involved in the first iterations of these course clusters and the faculty-student collaboration that has gone into developing many of the pilot contributions to Bryn Mawr's innovative college-wide program.

This kind of partnership between an institutional initiative and a forum for faculty-student collaboration builds on and extends collaborative models of professional development that include students as partners in post-secondary faculty development programs (Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2011; Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, forthcoming). Working with faculty members to develop, teach, and assess clusters of courses for the 360 program, students assume the role of pedagogical consultant (Cook-Sather, 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008; Cook-Sather & Alter, 2011; Cox & Sorenson 2000), become members of teams with faculty and staff who design or redesign course curricula (Bovill, in press; Delpish et al., 2010), and assume the responsibility of partners in conceptualizing approaches to assessment. As with all the work of the TLI, students are not only partners but also change agents, a term that "explicitly supports a view of the student as 'active collaborator' and 'co-producer', with the potential for transformation" (Dunne in Foreword to Dunne & Zandstra, 2011, p. 4; see also Neary, 2010).

The nine contributions to this issue offer glimpses into the complex relationships, processes, and approaches participants in the inaugural 360s took to developing this new program. Each essay offers short descriptions of the 360 course cluster and the particular courses included in it, analyses of the ways in which student consultants worked with faculty as they developed, taught,

and assessed the 360 courses, and particular experiences and insights gained through those collaborations. Particularly striking about these discussions is the insight they offer into how to help make clusters of courses coherent, as opposed to how to make a single course work on its own. This shift in focus, informed to a great extent by the work of the student consultants, has implications beyond the 360 program: all students are striving for such a balance, if not integration, all the time, and faculty and administrators will benefit from understanding this student experience and perspective in thinking about higher education overall.

In “Developing Partnerships: Creating and Growing the 360° Program at Bryn Mawr College,” Kim Cassidy, Provost of Bryn Mawr College and creator of the 360 program, discusses her vision of the program, how she sees it unfolding, and her perspective on the role of student consultants in working with faculty as they develop, teach, and assess the 360s. Embracing the same spirit of dialogue and collaboration that animates The Andrew W. Mellon Teaching and Learning Institute and that is illustrated in the essays included in this issue, Kim developed the 360 program with input from faculty, students, and others in the college community, striving to be both rigorous and responsive to faculty and student interest.

In “‘Changing Education’: Helping to Conceptualize the First 360,” Elliott Shore, Chief Information Officer, Constance A. Jones Director of Libraries and Professor of History at Bryn Mawr College, and co-creator of the first 360, “Changing Education,” describes from a faculty perspective the process of developing this first cluster of courses. He acknowledges the many people involved in helping to conceptualize, develop, and enact the first 360, he pinpoints several key insights he gained through his partnerships with his student consultants, and he emphasizes how his work with student consultants carried over into new forms of partnership with students enrolled in his courses.

In “The Sixth Space: Watching Students Build Connections and Thematic Understanding Through Recontextualizing Content Outside of the Classroom,” Anna Chiles, Bryn Mawr College class of 2011 and the student consultant for “Changing Education,” offers her perspective on the development of that first 360. Anna provides glimpses into how she worked to facilitate the unfolding of this complex new undertaking — building bridges across the courses, bringing participants in the courses together, catalyzing interactions and revisions as the 360 unfolded. She highlights in particular how she experienced that facilitating and catalyzing role — what insights she gained as a student and future teacher through her partnership with faculty.

In “To Find Fruit: A Contemplative Assessment of a 360 Experience,” Professor of Chemistry at Bryn Mawr College, Michelle M. Franci, offers some thoughts on working with a student consultant to assess “Contemplative Traditions,” the 360 she taught with two colleagues, one in East Asian Studies and one in Psychology. In an essay whose governing metaphor captures the challenges and joys of finding fruit, Michelle highlights some of the ways in which working with a student consultant informed her own and her faculty colleagues’ thinking not only about assessment but also, more generally, about what makes for a coherent and engaging educational experience.

In “360 Degrees of Pedagogy,” Alice Lesnick describes how she led the development of a 360 called “Learning and Narrating Childhoods” with one student consultant, Praise Agu, and taught

it, working with two colleagues, with the support of another student consultant, Sarah Brown. Offering glimpses into key moments in the development and unfolding of the 360, Alice highlights both essential qualities of her partnership with her student consultants — “our roles less intensely power-laden, shared investments more expansive” — and particular insights and influences her student consultants had — a specific text mentioned by one, which became a touchstone for Alice’s course; the keen and measured analysis offered by the other, which helped the faculty address some conflict at a critical juncture during the unfolding of the 360.

In “A Student Consultant’s Perspective on the Execution of 360 and what challenges and opportunities for teaching and learning are created by 360s,” Sarah Brown, Haverford College 2012, offers her perspective on and insights from the experience of working on the “Learning and Narrating Childhoods” 360. Like Anna Chiles, Sarah worked to link the courses and integrate student experiences across them, and she highlights in her essay some of the key differences in experience and perspective faculty members and students enrolled in their courses bring to this program. Both logistical and conceptual, these differences have the potential to undermine the 360 if not attended to by all participants — a process in which Sarah played a key role as both analyst and facilitator.

In “Multiple Layers of Participation: Working with Student Leaders in our 360°,” Jody Cohen, Term Professor of Education, Victor Donnay, Professor of Mathematics, and Carola Hein, Associate Professor of Growth and Structure of Cities, describe their work with several student consultants in the development, teaching, and assessment of a 360 called “Perspectives on Sustainability.” They discuss how working with students as leaders and colleagues enhanced individual courses and the 360 cluster of courses and offered the students who assumed leadership roles occasions to learn about learning and teaching and to blend theory and practice in ways that expand their understandings and their skill sets. Given the newness of all aspects of the endeavor, as they write — “the courses themselves, the call to intellectual work across disciplines, the diverse extra-classroom components, and the structure of a cluster in which our students would take three of their four courses together and in a single space” — they address the question: how would layering student leadership into this mix complicate and also crystallize these occasions for teaching and learning?

Finally, “From the Students’ Perspective” offers a set of recommendations from student consultants who have worked with faculty members on developing, teaching, and assessing 360s.

In her reflections below, Kaushiki *Dunusinghe*, Student Guest Editor of this issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*, offers insight from her perspective on the work of teaching and learning as partnerships and, specifically, on the development of one particular 360° course cluster through the TLI.

**Kaushiki Dunusinghe, Student Guest Editor, Bryn Mawr College 2012**

When I first met Professor Victor Donnay of the Bryn Mawr Math Department at the end of spring semester during my junior year at Bryn Mawr to discuss the possibility of working on a senior thesis with a mathematical modeling component, I had little idea that I would be embarking on a yearlong collaborative teaching and learning journey that would completely change my perspective towards higher education. My only expectation going into this initial meeting was to find a common area of mathematics we are interested in, which will allow me to write a senior thesis under Professor Donnay's supervision. However, as we talked about our interests, passions, goals, and pasts, we realized that we had much more in common than our love for the subject. Our passion and commitment towards education was highlighted throughout the conversation. I was thrilled at the prospect of writing a thesis that not only had a mathematical modeling component but also an education component.

The idea of learning the math related to sustainability and helping Professor Donnay develop material for the "Introduction to Math and Sustainability" course emerged as we continued our discussion regarding a senior research topic that combined math and education. "Introduction to Math and Sustainability" was one of the courses in the "Perspectives on Sustainability" 360° cluster that was set to be taught in the spring of 2012. I jumped at this opportunity to get involved in the 360° program and to combine all my passions and interests into one senior research project. I was honored by the invitation to directly contribute towards a college-level math course.

Nevertheless, my knowledge on the 360° program was limited to knowing that the students in the program went on week-long trips to exotic places like Japan and Ghana. As I continued to talk to Professor Donnay, I learned about the philosophy behind the 360° program and great possibilities it created for students to study about a topic they were passionate about from multiple perspectives. I was excited to be part of this interdisciplinary adventure and jumped into the challenge with my both feet.

I started studying the different mathematical tools used to evaluate sustainability related issues in the *Sustainable Energy Without the Hot Air* by David JC MacKay, which was supposed to be the primary text in the "Math and Sustainability" course. I explored the material myself and met with Professor Donnay weekly to discuss my findings; I presented the material to him and we worked together on issues that rose during my research. We also talked about ways and which we could present this material to the students who will be taking the "Math and Sustainability" course.

My involvement with the "Perspectives on Sustainability" 360° broadened as the semester unfolded. Apart from my weekly meetings with Professor Donnay, I also started attending the 360° planning meetings with all three faculty members involved in the 360°. These meetings focused on a variety of aspects ranging from planning field trips to coming up with overarching learning goals for the 360°. I was able to provide the group with the student perspective in these discussions. I believe that my contribution helped the group make student-friendly decisions with regards to many aspects of the 360°.

The exposure to this planning process was an eye-opening experience for me as a student, as well. Being able to see the amount of thought and work that goes into developing a course, or a course cluster as in this case, helped me appreciate the work professors and teachers in general do to create inspirational learning opportunities for students. The faculty members' deep passion and commitment towards their own disciplines, interdisciplinary teaching and learning, and education made these discussions intellectually stimulating: I felt honored to be in the presence of such passionate work. My passion towards teaching and education was further confirmed through this experience.

As the "Perspectives on Sustainability" 360° was launched in the spring of 2012, my participation with the 360° program further expanded. I attended Professor Donnay's "Math and Sustainability" class daily as a student observer. As Professor Donnay was introducing different mathematical tools that are used to understand and evaluate sustainability issues to the class, I looked for cues in students' behavior and facial expressions to identify the extent to which students were grasping the material. I listened closely to the conversations that were happening in the classroom and took note of who was actively participating in the classroom learning and who was struggling with the concepts. Professor Donnay and I met after each class meeting to discuss how we thought the class went. Using my classroom observation notes, we diagnosed the different issues that arose in the class. Then we talked about possible solutions for these concerns in order to create a better classroom learning experience for the students.

My interactions with the students extended beyond the classroom; I talked to them about the class and the 360° cluster in general at the lunch table, in my dorm, and during field trips. Thus, I was able to attain a lot of feedback from the students regarding the progress of the 360°. The students felt more comfortable talking to me when an issue came up rather than going to one of the faculty members since I was one of their peers. They shared their concerns and frustrations with me; too much homework, not enough time for classroom discussion, too many field trips, inability to identify the relation between field trips and classroom learning. I shared this information with the faculty group and worked collaboratively with them to come up with possible resolutions.

I also conducted problem sessions once a week in which I helped students work through homework assignments. This was another platform where I collected data regarding students' experience within the sustainability 360°. I also used this as a place to connect with students who came into the class with some form of "math anxiety" and to relieve some of that angst by helping them review their algebraic skills and sharing some tools I had learned as a math major. The most empowering aspect of my experience with the sustainability 360° was the opportunity to teach a few lessons in Professor Donnay's class using the curriculum material I developed the previous fall. It was a great feeling of accomplishment to be able to stand in front of a college-level classroom and present an engaging lesson. Professor Donnay switched places with me to be the class observer during these sessions. The constructive feedback I received from him regarding my presentations was invaluable to my growth as an aspiring educator.

My involvement with the 360° program not only changed my outlook towards higher education, it also drastically improved my senior-year experience at Bryn Mawr. I became more cognizant of my strengths and weaknesses as a student, which helped me throughout all the courses I was

pursuing. I became an autonomous learner who took control of her learning. I also became more aware of the teaching and learning that happened in my own classes. In addition to learning the course material in my classes, I also paid close attention to the pedagogical approaches different professors used in the classroom and their effectiveness. This meta-level awareness helped me develop my own educational philosophy.

The skill set I developed working as a student partner in the 360° program helps me immensely today in my day-to-day work as a high school math teacher. In making my curriculum and daily lesson plans, I innately think about how my students will receive the information I'm attempting to convey to them. I always create opportunities for my students to voice their concerns and frustrations and adjust the structure of the classroom and my pedagogical approach accordingly. I see my partnership with Professor Donnay as the ideal student-teacher relationship. Thus, I strive to develop a similar collaborative teaching and learning adventure with my own students.

### Final Thought

In including these multiple perspectives on the development, teaching, and assessment of the 360s, we hope that this collection of reflections constitutes its own version of a 360 — an exploration, from various angles of vision, of how faculty-student collaboration can deepen and enrich teaching and learning in higher education not only within individual courses but also in the development of a college-wide program. We hope the various essays in this issue will be of use to others considering or already undertaking collaborative teaching efforts and, in particular, those who wish to do so in partnership with students.

### References

Bovill, C. (in press). An investigation of co-created curricula within higher education in the UK, Ireland and the USA. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*.

Bovill, C., A. Cook-Sather, & P. Felten. (2011). Students as co-creators of teaching approaches, course design and curricula: Implications for academic developers. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 16, 2, 133-145.

Cook-Sather, A. (2011). Teaching and learning together: College faculty and undergraduates co-create a professional development model. *To Improve the Academy*, 29, 219-232.

Cook-Sather, A. (2010). Students as learners and teachers: Taking responsibility, transforming education, and redefining accountability. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 40, 4, 555-575.

Cook-Sather, A. (2009). From traditional accountability to shared responsibility: The benefits and challenges of student consultants gathering midcourse feedback in college classrooms. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 34, 2, 231-241.

Cook-Sather, A. (2008). "What you get is looking in a mirror, only better": Inviting students to reflect (on) college teaching. *Reflective Practice* 9, 4, 473-483.

Cook-Sather, A., & Alter, Z. (2011). What is and what can be: How a liminal position can change learning and teaching in higher education. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 42, 1, 37-53.

Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C., & Felten, P. (forthcoming). *Engaging students as partners in teaching & learning: A guide for faculty*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cox, M. D., & Sorenson, D. L. (2000). Student collaboration in faculty development. *To Improve the Academy* 18: 97-106.

Delpish, A., Holmes, A, Knight-McKenna, M., Mihans, R., Darby, A., King, K., & Felten, P. (2010). Equalizing voices: Student-faculty partnership in course design. In C. Werder & M. M. Otis. (Eds.), *Engaging student voices in the study of teaching and learning* (pp. 96–114). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Dunne, E. & Zandstra, R. (2011). *Students as change agents. New ways of engaging with learning and teaching in higher education*. Bristol: ESCalate Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Education / University of Exeter.

Neary, M. (2010). Student as producer: A pedagogy for the avant-garde? *Learning Exchange*, 1, 1.